

# The Evolving Raison D'etres of Digital Video in ESL Speaking Instruction

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**Abstract** – This paper concentrates on roles of digital video in English as a Second Language from 2000-2012. First, 'Where video has been commonly used' is discussed thematically and then 'Why video has been used' is examined in pedagogic detail. This leads to a discussion of digital video in flexible education and the issue of learner anxiety in the neglected macro skill of speaking. The paper concludes with an emphasis on transferability of skills and a need for a broader, matured role for video in pedagogy.

**Keywords** – Speaking, Transferable Skills, EAP, Video Pedagogy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, Video use has been on one-of-three levels of sophistication. At the lowest level video is restricted to TV and film watching, as a rewarding 'break' from learning. At the middle level of use, Teacher's simply turn DVD subtitles on or off once at the beginning of viewing, using the pause button periodically to ask annoying questions, that interrupt their pursuit of passive entertainment. At the top level, video has been used as a genuine educational tool, but has been treated by the Teacher as a misunderstood CD-player involved in a game of "show, but don't tell". In this case, video is an active component of the lesson but it is limited to listening exercises for those students who have already managed to obtain advanced-level student status.

What follows is not an exhaustive list but a description of the different contexts of successful use. These contexts are presented in comparable pairs or trios to be concise and they map out areas of crossover as well as fading borders. This paper is a thematic-view of video-use in ESL highlighting the main areas of activity, looking forward to future trends.

## II. WHERE VIDEO HAS BEEN COMMONLY USED

In this section three similar learning contexts will be grouped together and compared by the way they use video. The goal is to distinguish minor variations in context that don't affect learning aims, from minor variations in context that do.

For the purpose of language learning, Video can be used in many different contexts, in many different ways to facilitate many different desired results. The specific demands of a context correlate favourably with specific usages when the desired result *actively* shapes the allocation of human, technological and non-human resources within that context. Once we discern minor from major variations affecting learning aims, we can unshackle the role of video to a site or context limit-based theory construction, and guide it towards multiple-reinforcement, where content and

context feed into each other into a broader raft of unified application.

## III. VIDEO FOR LESSON REVIEW

In "Emerging Technologies going to the MALL: Mobile Assisted Language Learning" Chinnery [1] talks about mobile and personal devices used in 'nomadic learning environments' at an American University for the purposes of EFL (English as a Foreign Language). The devices had functions including various e-learning tools (SMS/access to live tutors /push media) and lecture notes (vocab practise, quizzes, word/phrase translations). More obvious limitations of screen/keyboard size alongside poor audio quality were mentioned leading Chandra to conclude "such devices are unsuitable for learning new content but effective for review and practice" (Thornton & Houser 2002, p. 236 quoted in Chinnery 2006). Less obvious limitations included limited non-verbal communications, a lack of cultural context and potentially limited social interaction – sizeable concerns.

In "Experiences in personal lecture capture" Chandra [2], previously assistant professor in the department of Computer Science & Engineering at the University of Notre Dame (U.S.A) and at the time visiting Research Scientist at the FX Palo Alto Laboratory (a research centre for Fuji Xerox Co., Ltd), talks about lecturers recording their own lectures and making the recordings available to students as a means of lecture review, noting that podcasts (*including* video or *limiting* recordings to audio) had become a popular tool for this purpose. McKinney et al. (quoted in Chandra 2011, p.261) reported that "psychology students who took notes while listening to audio-only podcast did better than students who attended the actual lectures", giving credence to the idea that lecture review materials make a worthwhile contribution to course learning objectives. The research findings of McKinney about audio-only podcasts and Thornton & Houser's findings, provide some evidence to support the idea that visually appropriate content, not just 'talking-head' lectures from a long familiar verbal tradition better exploit the visual aspect of video. Chandra's experiences in the lab at Palo Alto appear to support his contention that to do so requires HD video, with its larger image size, and large screen (to visualise the non-verbal, cultural and social cues).

## IV. VIDEO FOR REHEARSAL AND INTERACTION PRACTICE

In the early 1990's, the Department of Foreign Languages at a Taiwanese university was given a grant by the Ministry of Education to acquire equipment for teaching

enhancement. Thus in Liou's [3] evaluative paper "Practical considerations for Multimedia Courseware development", she evaluates both the adoption of a technology (multimedia) and its implementation into teaching. Liou focused on three main areas of evaluation of this effort, two of which are of interest here; the first area being the setting of course objectives, the second area being the training of direct and indirect learning strategies. For objectives, Liou set the aim of "Encourag (ing) students to become active listeners, guessers, predictors, and risk takers" (2004, p.50). Training of learning strategies on the other hand, involved direct strategies and indirect strategies, strategies that support the direct ones. For example, the indirect strategy of learning to tolerate less than total understanding, or the indirect learning strategy of focusing on self-improvement not immediate perfection, support direct learning strategies such as increasing auditory and visual memory. For Liou, the negotiated interaction model is ideal, where the aim is to provide students with an instrument for negotiation of meaning whereby they "watch, listen, and interpret the story by making guesses... develop active listening skills by using whichever clues are available to the students...seek further information by requesting confirmation of guesses, to make decisions about what further information is needed, to increase tolerance of ambiguity" (2004, p.52). Liou is really quite ambitious in what she sets out to achieve via multimedia.

By means of a critical analysis of articles published in the *Modern Language Journal* since its first edition in 1916, Salaberry [4] at the department of Hispanic Studies at Rice University (U.S.A) wrote the paper "The Use of Technology for Second Language Learning and Teaching: A Retrospective". He comments in regards to what he termed CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) and his comments make salient points that are applicable to language laboratories. First Salaberry quotes Warschauer who noted "CMC creates the opportunity for a group to construct knowledge together, thus linking reflection and interaction" (Warschauer, p. 473).

At the language centre at the University of Oxford (England) Vanderplank [5] also takes the retrospective angle when commenting on research on language teaching and learning from 1999-2009 (focusing on implementation), in his paper "De' ja' vu? A decade of research on language laboratories, television and video in language learning". Vanderplank makes the case that "Learners want expert teaching and well selected, graded and structured learning rather than having the teacher as 'facilitator and the learner free to make his or her own interpretations' (2009, p.57)". Vanderplank also voices concerns that language labs inhibit social interaction between peers and teachers. His paper highlights a need to guide students, suggesting the language lab "has a valuable role to play as we move back to appreciating the value of repeated rehearsal and practice combined with interaction, and, of course, the LL is ideally suited to individual and collaborative tasks under teacher monitoring" (2009, p.32).

## **V. VIDEO FOR CRITICAL & COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

In "On Materials Use Training in EFL Teacher Education" Moncada [6] describes a teacher preparation program in South America. She talks about three traditional problems encountered in early teacher training that are relevant to our discussion: 1) Overuse of "work sheets" to practice grammar structures, 2) Making materials that are not quite useful 3) Choosing inappropriate material for the students' cognitive and linguistic level.

In a decidedly international effort, J. K. Jacobs et. al [7] discuss the *Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 1999 Video Studies* a large-scale, video-based, cross-national survey of teaching, which involved filming Grade 8 classrooms, in seven different countries. The authors site the greatest advantage of video-based data being its versatility as video can be examined from multiple perspectives in ways that the research team might not have originally thought of.

In "A brief history of video feedback and its role in Foreign Language Education" F. Tochon [8] discusses the use of video for Video Feedback and Situated Research in video study groups, stressing that video has "freed research from an exclusively laboratory-based approach and broadened its scope to include self-viewing and other-viewing in reflective groups" (2008, p.420). Tochon used video for research into teacher training. The purposes of Teacher learning require "the inclusion of a realistic presentation of the indeterminacy of practical contexts" (Tochon 2008, p.423). The purposes video in research on teacher training were put to were threefold 1] Rethinking the past (help teachers identify students' misunderstanding) 2] Reconceptualising present thoughts (systematic questioning making tacit mental processes explicitly conscious to increase self-knowledge and control of actions) 3] Conceptualising the future (reflection flowing from individual cases integrated into shared practice). Thus video feedback "provides a mode of action for critical and cooperative self-development (2008, p.430).

In all of the above contexts, first the context of teacher training at a University, then the context of High school research and finally the context of situated research, video's role was to enable critical and cooperative development of a process, through participants having access to multiple perspectives on the same activity. Though the subject and the purposes of that 'development' varied considerably, the role for video to facilitate development remained.

## **VI. VIDEO FOR ARGUMENTATION / MEDIA LITERACY**

In M. Burt's [9] "Using Videos with Adult English Language Learners" she discusses authentic video. *Authentic video* refers to the authentic language input potential of scripted Movies and TV programs made for native speakers that are considered authentic in the sense that they provide authentic linguistic input.

As Burt, partly quoting Florez, highlights "just as learners need to develop critical literacy skills in order to

analyze what they read to distinguish fact from fiction or to identify an author's position on a topic and compare it to their own (Florez 1998), they also need to be able to do this with what they see and hear, i.e., with films and television programs” (Burt 1999, p.1).

M. Mekheimer [10] in “The Impact of Using Videos on Whole Language Learning in EFL Context” mentions how “Video-viewing experiences further generated more student-teacher, student-student discussions and students were prompted to keep writing, using vocabulary, and listening journals vis-à-vis their video-viewing experiences (2001, p.27)”.

In “Decoding visual elements in digitised foreign newscasts”, Gruba [11], focusing on cognition, argues that sound knowledge structures are the basis for media literacy. These building blocks rest upon information about both the real world and media conventions, and are formed “through the skills of analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, synthesis and abstracting. while the visual elements may be used to generate hypotheses about the structure of the narrative, these hypotheses need to be continually evaluated on the basis of the aural input, which remains the primary source of ‘meaning’ in this context” (Gruba 2007, p.352).

Mekheimer, Garza and Shareman [12] all use different techniques. Mekheimer champions in-class, analytical discussion, Garza champions ‘video exploitation’ techniques to get the most out of the materials and Shareman champions an almost ‘media-studies like’ approach to teaching practicum. The end result is use of a digital medium to visually contextualise situations with awareness of media conventions and genre, in order to more analytically conceive of authentic language.

## VII. VIDEO FOR SELF & PEER TASK EVALUATION

In Turkey “A Blended learning study on implementing video recorded speaking tasks in task-based classroom instruction”, Y. Kirkgoz [13] conducted a study of 28 first-year student teachers of English, involving three hours of task-based classroom instruction, complemented with one hour of additional class time, which was spent viewing and evaluating students’ video recorded speaking tasks, which had been given as homework. The advantage of using video in this context is that “students can watch and see themselves and their fellow friends’ performances” (2004, p.2). Corresponding to each task was a particular rhetorical function, e.g., narration, description, problem-solution, argumentation. Students were asked to assess their task performance, and they were suggested to critique on any aspect of the task. In addition to video-recording of their speaking, the students listened to their own speech and transcribed sections themselves. Using task transcripts, students were asked to notice and highlight interesting features and the language that they used in their talk. These proved to be very useful in increasing students’ awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. “[S]tudents, through cognitively engaging tasks that reflect authentic and purposeful use of language, were able to communicate

meaningfully and effectively” (2011, p.9). Kirkgoz quotes Foster’s (1999) arguments that “...giving learners tasks to transact, rather than items to learn, provides an environment which best promotes the natural learning of languages” (p. 69) giving her readers a clear suggestion for putting the observation into action.

In the paper “Digital video production and task based language learning” Dal [14] notes “...in video production the language learner is given a choice not only about what to say, but also how to say it and how to present a point of view” (2010, p.5). This encourages cooperation among students in foreign language classes. A student contributes to a joint group work and is therefore “responsible to the group and not only himself” (2010, p.5). According to Dal the essential part of the preparation is developing a script for the video production. This script should be written in the target language and the whole student team should be involved in writing the script. For this approach an important part of the recording procedure is the rehearsal, where the participants try out the instructions in the script. In Dal’s view, Short unscripted tasks where students only refer to their notes work best for the evaluative presentation stage because they facilitate “the collaborative and individual process of knowledge construction” (2010, p.11).

## VIII. VIDEO AS CULTURALLY-SUITABLE MODEL

In “Video and Second Language Learning” J. Berwald [15] discusses various novel ways teacher prepared materials have been used in language teaching, one of particular interest which is presented here. Oates and Hawley (1983, quoted in Berwald) prepared video tapes based on interviews with foreign travellers to their community. The pictures biographies were then passed out to students who prepared written questions they would like to ask when they eventually met the guests. After the questions were submitted to the teachers and corrected, the questions were returned to the students who practice asking and answering them in groups of twos and threes. At the final stage of the activity the travellers arrived and a ten-minute taped interview took place. The tape was later played back with and without the sound to focus on language, gestures, and the use of filler-words and hesitation formulas.

T. Garza [16] in “The Message is the Medium” says it was not the choice of technology that determined success in language learning, but the use/adaptation of materials. In his words, “The key rule to producing *video exploitation* materials is to adjust the task, not the text” (Garza 1996, p.16). By video exploitation tools he was referring to captioning, colourisation, video enhancement & overlay, time-code and accompanying printed materials. Garza suggested video could be better exploited in order to “provide an active context to present and work through the various paralinguistic features, such as register, tone, gesture, proxemics etc... Social relationships and inherent behaviour are contextualised visually so as to clarify intangible concepts such as emotion, disposition, demeanour and tone” (1996, p.3).

In “Incorporating audio-visual materials in university teaching” Rebekah Wong [17] discussed the results of a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Baptist University Library regarding faculty attitudes on the use of audio-visual materials for teaching. The results suggested there was a fairly high level of AV material used in teaching (some faculties more than others), and general satisfaction regarding material content. Video in library collections can be contrasted with materials available in online video community such as youtube. Putting the making of constantly updated videos in the hands of “the community” is a future avenue for lightening the burden of video ‘collection’ and reliance on external departments for material.

So, thus far, we have seen video “used” for lesson review, for rehearsal and interaction practice, for critical & cooperative development, for argumentation / media literacy, for self & peer task evaluation and as culturally-suitable model. Now that we have a macro view of how video has been utilised in terms of context and suitability of application, let us now turn our attention to a micro view of learner aims.

## **IX. WHY VIDEO HAS BEEN USED**

### *A. Learning Content/Focus*

In this next section we take the focus away from context and put it towards key factors effecting learning aims. This section aims to answer the question does video offer equal utility across all content areas? As has been shown it is robust under a number of different contextual constraints, but does that robustness translate into the content as well (curriculum)?

### *B. Conversation Strategies and Paralinguistics*

Conversational strategies can be divided into nine types “in order of significance: message adjustment or avoidance, paraphrase, approximation, appeal for help, asking for repetition, asking for clarification, interpretive summary, checking (for comprehension and confirmation), and use of fillers/hesitation devices”, Dörnyei & Thurrell, quoted in Nyuget and Mai [18]. According to Nyuget and Mai’s interpretation, finding ways to prepare students for spontaneous communication is one of the hardest challenges for all methodologists.

For paralinguistics, “that frequent use of conversational strategies could enhance the learners’ speaking performance if they knew when and how to use the strategies in an appropriate manner...” (Nguyen 2012, p.41); suggesting a need for video not just as a culturally-suitable model, but rehearsal and interaction practice, based on that model. This way strategy adoption would translate into improved speaking performance

### *C. Language Production/Grammar Acquisition*

Herron et al [19] obtained results that indicated students significantly improved their listening skills and grammar knowledge when exposed to the story-based video package. Using a film with an engaging storyline and with embedded targeted structures for input works to enhance linguistic performance. In his own words

“Students’ improvement in grammar performance was probably related to the quantity and quality of grammar activities in the textbook and ancillary materials. Their average improvement of 17.4% from pretest to posttest clearly indicates that they benefited from the program’s grammar explanations and activities (Herron p.294, 2006)”. Supporting materials appear important to the success of using video to aid grammar acquisition

Arslanyilmaz et al [20] studied the effects of subtitled similar task videos on language production by non-native speakers (NNSs) in an online task-based language learning (TBLL) environment. Language production was looked at in terms of fluency, accuracy, and complexity (lexical and syntactic).

As has been noted previously, ‘When students were provided with prior knowledge about the task before completing it, they produced significantly more fluent language than when they were not provided with it’ (Good & Butterworth, 1980 – Quoted in Arslanyilmaz et al).

So if the learning aim is to improve language production and grammar acquisition, rehearsal is not as important as it may be with other learning aims. Also, supporting printed materials and relevancy of content genre to the students are most important factors.

### *D. Vocabulary*

In “Video in the Language Lab: Teaching Vocabulary” in relation to Vocabulary, Tatsuki [21] noted, learners who read illustrative sentences (sentences capturing a scene in the movie and model the correct usage of a target vocabulary item) scored better on a multiple choice test than did those who read the narrative only or read the narrative and watched the video. In Tatsuki’s words “This would indicate that if vocabulary learning is going to be measured by productive use, video is certainly facilitative. If, on the other hand, vocabulary gain is going to be measured via multiple choice testing, video will be most efficient if learners are provided with contextualized sentence models” (Tatsuki 1999, p.1).

In relation to word type (which is learnt best verbs or nouns), Chih-cheng Lin [22] noted how “by reading glosses at the margins, learners learned vocabulary better than those by consulting dictionary definitions (Hulstijn, Hollander, & Greidanus, 1996)” (Chih-cheng Lin 2009, p.25). In theory, animation should be best at showing change and processes, and thus ideal for teaching verbs, but “in practice, however, it is designed to explain concepts that are hard for still images to illustrate” (Iheanacho, 1997 - quoted in Lin).

### *E. Culture*

In “What the Eye Doesn’t See: Cross-Cultural Problems in the Comprehension of Video Material” R. Tuffs [23] first made the point that the visual cultural cues in videos are never explained but rather shown, not told. Only students with cultural backgrounds in close approximation to the target language will have the appropriate culture knowledge and media literacy skills to decode these cues. Thus only those already culturally-familiar students gain any cultural clarification. Those who need it most are not only denied the enormous cultural coaching and elucidation potential of video, but are banished to ‘intermediate-level’ status. In

2000 Herron [24], focusing on cultural knowledge noted, regarding oral performance,

*“students performed culturally appropriately more than 60% of the time. Students perceived that the videos contained more little than big “C” culture and that they learned more little “c.” In other words, the intrinsic quality of video (a mixture of linguistic and visual material) appears to facilitate students’ apprehension of cultural elements, especially at the level of social patterns of living” (Herron 2000, p.418).*

There is still the enormous issue of how to assess student understanding of the *meaning* behind the cultural practices and products of a society. Though this is big problem it is also a tantalising invitation for further research.

## X. DISCUSSION - FLEXIBLE EDUCATION, DIGITAL VIDEO & SPEAKER ANXIETY

So having considered the main contexts and content areas, the final question is where this leads us to in the future.

Including digital video as one web 2.0 technology out of many, Franklin made the following comment regarding technologies role in Higher Education. “(T)he catalytic effects of Web 2.0 technologies are attractive, allowing greater student independence and autonomy, greater collaboration, and increased pedagogic efficiency [25].

One new area is Flexible Education. Flexible education is “an overarching approach that emphasises increase in options, giving learners greater control over their learning”, where “the responsibility of getting students involved, balancing participation and choice and using technology to help students to engage rather than encouraging them to disengage, falls on the educators”, Mason [26], while the learning process is student-centred.

At the institutional level this approach falls under the umbrella term flexible education, which when including a formal in-class element is referred to more specifically as blended learning. As a form of mixed-mode delivery flexible education differentiates itself from the polar extremes of distance education on one hand and formal in-class instruction on the other because as the experience at Deakin University showed “blended environments that included face-to-face components were deliberately designed to facilitate the required learning and participants felt that this was a necessary aspect. As one participant explained: ‘The experience is not the same, you can actually access the material but if you don’t turn up, you get a much reduced experience (Mason, 2009, p.43)

Looking specifically at video recorded speaking tasks delivered via blended learning Kirkgoz describes the utility of video in a flexible education context.

*In addition to video-recording of their speaking, the students listened to their own speech and transcribed sections themselves. Using task transcripts, students were asked to notice and highlight interesting features and the language that they used in their talk. These proved to be very useful in increasing students’ awareness of their strengths and weaknesses... The impact of the blended TBSC, particularly students’ video recording of their speaking tasks independently working at their own pace,*

*has been significant in helping students to overcome their anxiety... the fact that students performed two similar tasks under each theme, one during the face-to-face learning and the other outside the lesson, helped to achieve task continuity; thus, leading to greater accuracy and complexity in performance (Kirkgoz, 2004).*

## XI. CONCLUSION

A broader, more mature approach to video pedagogy is needed. Video is, at present, the medium that takes the subjective experience and makes it tactile, both privately and publically, and can also be “read as a text”, linking it to a long tradition of learning. With the advent of wide circulation of smart phones with video recording devices already sitting in students’ pockets, learning itself has become ‘untethered’. Video has a role to play in the classroom and in the curriculum. We should not rely on video to simply check student understanding or ‘get’ meaning left unexplained, but to offer culturally-decoded exposure and thus perspective on communication. Perspective is only possible when there is reduced anxiety from educators providing learners with greater control over their learning by being able to point out and note the increase in specific instances of speaking task success. There is a role for video in coaching students to apply language resources and guiding them to transfer analytical and intuitive verbal skills to both new and unfamiliar contexts. Thus developments such as flexible education and blended learning coupled with advances in mobile technology and web 2.0 may well provide future opportunities not only for a more mature role for video but a transferability of skills and new found confidence in students that untethers learning, instead of simply flipping over the classroom.

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